

Boost Free Lessons - Year 8 English

Lesson 17: Reading Poetry: Mood and Tone

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Read the poem below carefully. The line numbers will help you refer to specific parts of the poem in your answers.

Handover

- 1 The keys go in an envelope, all four,
- 2 the front, the back, the shed, the one
- 3 nobody ever worked out.
- 4
- 5 My mother writes the address of the new place
- 6 on the outside, then crosses it out,
- 7 then writes it again more slowly,
- 8 as though the second time will make it true.
- 9
- 10 Twenty-two years fit into eleven boxes.
- 11 We had expected more, and said so,
- 12 and laughed about it in the empty hall
- 13 where our voices had gone strange and large.
- 14
- 15 The buyer's children are already measuring
- 16 my bedroom with a tape, calling out numbers
- 17 to each other, deciding where a bed will go.
- 18 They are not unkind. They simply cannot see me
- 19 standing in the doorway of a room
- 20 that stopped being mine an hour ago.
- 21
- 22 My mother tapes the envelope shut.
- 23 Somewhere behind us a child says: this one's mine.
- 24
- 25 The lawn will need mowing by the weekend.
- 26 That is somebody else's problem now,
- 27 and I find I mind that more than all of it.



Worked Example 1

Explain the effect of the mother crossing out and rewriting the address (lines 5 to 7).

1. Describe the action precisely: she writes it, crosses it out, writes it again *more slowly*.
2. Ask what the action reveals that no statement of feeling would.
3. Rewriting something already correct suggests reluctance rather than error.
4. Then explain the simile: *as though the second time will make it true* shows she is convincing herself, not the postal service.

Model: The mother rewrites an address that was already correct, and does so “more slowly” (line 7). The action shows reluctance rather than a mistake, and the line “as though the second time will make it true” (line 8) reveals she is trying to convince herself the move is real.

Remember: For poetry, read **actions** as carriers of feeling, and notice where a poet refuses an obvious emotion. Mood is what the reader feels; tone is the poet’s attitude, and the two are often deliberately different.



Question 1: Answer the following questions. Give the line numbers you used in your answers.

1. How many keys go in the envelope?

2. How many boxes hold twenty-two years?

3. What are the buyer's children doing?

4. How long ago did the room stop being the speaker's?

5. What does the child say behind them?

6. What does the speaker say will need doing by the weekend?



Question 2: Answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. Describe the mood of the poem and identify two things that create it.

2. What is the tone towards the buyer's children? Refer to the poem in your answer.

3. Explain the effect of the detail that the voices had gone *strange and large*.

4. Why does the poet end on the lawn rather than on the house or the family?

5. Explain the significance of the key *nobody ever worked out*.





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Answers and Model Responses: Reading Poetry: Mood and Tone**Question 1**

1. Four.
2. Eleven.
3. Measuring the speaker's bedroom with a tape and deciding where a bed will go.
4. An hour ago.
5. *This one's mine.*
6. The lawn will need mowing.

Question 2

1. Model: The mood is quietly grieving rather than dramatic. It is created by small physical actions standing in for feeling, such as the mother rewriting the address (lines 5 to 8), and by the emptiness of the house, shown when the voices go "strange and large" in the bare hall (line 13).
2. Model: The tone is generous rather than resentful. Line 18 states plainly that "They are not unkind", which refuses the easy option of blaming them and makes the loss sadder, because there is nobody to be angry with.
3. Model: Empty rooms echo, so the detail is physically accurate, but it also shows the house has already stopped being a home. The family's own voices sound unfamiliar in it, which suggests they no longer belong there.
4. Model: The lawn is the smallest and most ordinary thing in the poem. Ending there shows that grief attaches itself to trivial things rather than large ones, and the admission that the speaker minds it "more than all of it" (line 27) is more honest and more moving than any statement about the house itself.
5. Model: A key that opens nothing anybody remembers stands for the parts of a family's history that are lost without being noticed. It is handed over with the rest, which suggests the new owners inherit the house but not its meaning.

